

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2004

Second Prize: Ryan Walsh, St. Anthony School

Martin Luther King had a dream and although his life's work inspired changes in the Civil Rights Movement, the struggle continues. Martin Luther King dedicated his whole life to achieving civil rights for all people, through peaceful methods. His life is his legacy to us, but we still live in a world where prejudice, discrimination, and racial profiling continue. Examples can be seen in politics, sports, business, law enforcement housing, education and daily life.

On December 1st, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, when a Negro woman named Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on the bus to a white man, she was arrested for committing a "crime." Dr. King believed this to be unjust and led a boycott among blacks to not ride city buses. In June, 1956, the District Court of the U.S. and later the Supreme Court ruled that the bus laws in Montgomery were unconstitutional, and soon after, buses were integrated and blacks and whites would ride together side by side. This important event in the Civil Rights Movement proved that people could change the system and right the wrongs that had lasted for a decade. More than forty years later, events like this one still occur. There are people who refuse to sit next to a black person on a bus, in a restaurant, etc. There are people who refuse to live next to a black family or sell their home to blacks. We hear stories on the news about people burning crosses in the lawns of the homes of black families to try and drive them out of neighborhoods.

As blacks in the South tried to stand up for their rights, jailings and beatings continued to occur. Martin Luther King himself was unfairly arrested and jailed many times, and a firebomb was thrown on his porch. We hear many stories today of racial profiling by law enforcement. Some people feel that blacks today are wrongly accused, arrested and jailed more than whites. Some statistics seem to support this view.

Like the blacks in the South, blacks in South Africa had to sit in the back of a bus, use separate bathrooms and eat at separate lunch counters. In the early 1980's Nelson Mandela and his followers tried to stop Apartheid, but discrimination still exists in South Africa and in parts of the United States. In many countries blacks are not hired for certain jobs because of the color of their skin. There have been many discrimination lawsuits like the ones against Denny's Restaurants for not hiring blacks. There are only a handful of black CEO's of major corporations. In two hundred and twenty-eight years since 1776, there has never been a black president of the United States.

In the sports world, there is discrimination against blacks. In baseball, out of almost thirty teams, there are only 4 black managers, even though blacks make up about fifty percent of the players. In football, only two head coaches are black, but about sixty percent of the players are black. In basketball, about seventy percent of the players are black, yet I know of only one black owner, Robert L. Johnson, who just bought the new Charlotte Bobcats.

In 1964, Dr. King was nominated for the Noble Peace Prize. He was considered someone who "had contributed the most to the furtherance of peace among men." King used his prize money to form civil rights organizations, many of which still exist today. One of these organizations is the HCROA, or Human and Civil Rights Organizations of America. Their mission is to protect human rights and promote the liberty of all people, as Martin Luther King first preached. They believe that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." This is only one of the many organizations working in our world today for the rights of all people.

Four years before Dr. King passed away, the "Civil Rights Act of 1964" was passed. It stated that "all persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodation of any place of public accommodation, without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin." This inspired many blacks to continue to fight for their rights and for equal treatment. Sadly, many are still fighting for those rights today. Blacks like Oprah Winfrey, Quincy Jones, Ray Charles, Denzel Washington, Will Smith, and Jay-Z have been successful in the entertainment business, but blacks have not been so successful in many other businesses. And so, the struggle continues.

Resource List

Martin Luther King Jr. 10 Nov. 2004 www.holidays.net/mlk/story.htm

Haskins, James. The Life and Death of Martin Luther King Jr. New York: First Beech Tree Publishing, 1977.

Patrick, Diane. Martin Luther King, Jr. New York: Franklin Watts, 1990.

Dean Myers, Walter. I've Seen the Promised Land. China: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004